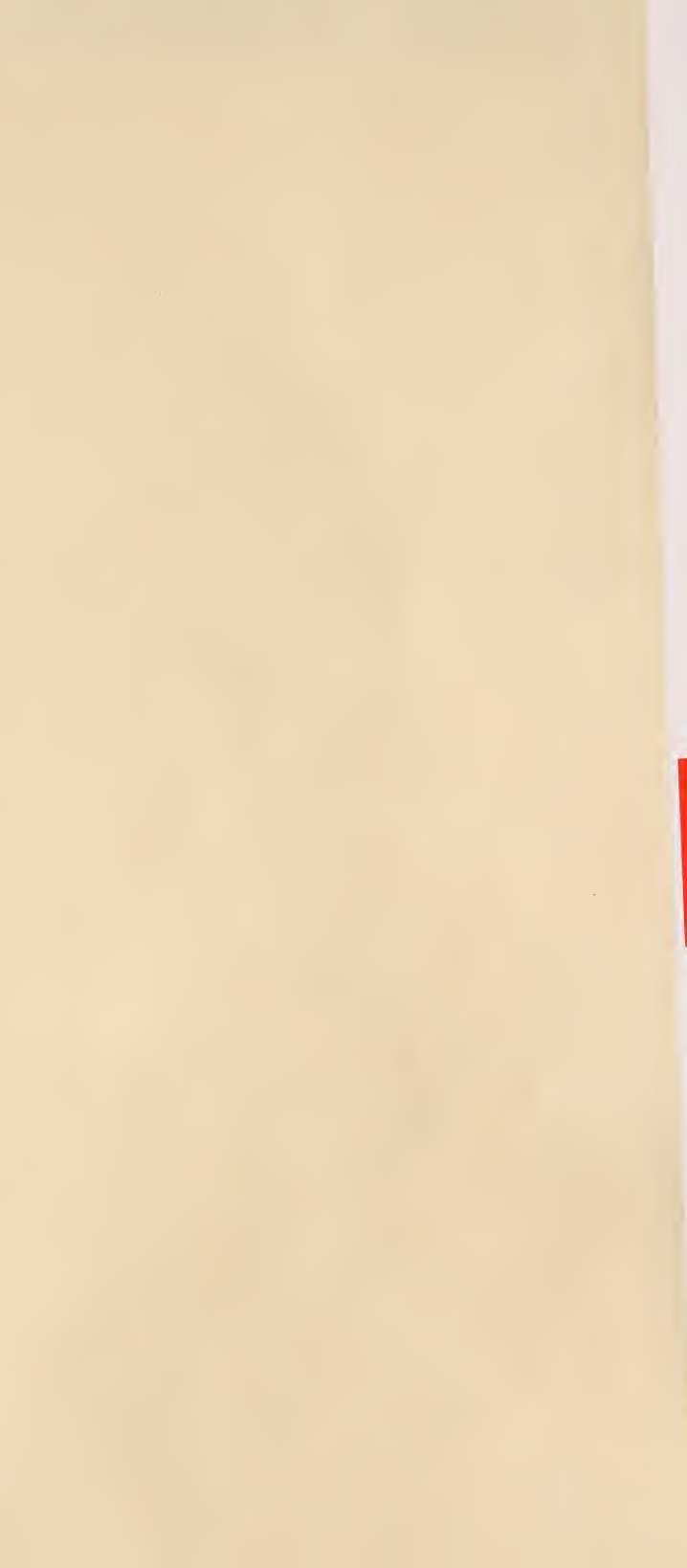


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Extension Home Economics— Reaching Today's Families



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Cooperative Extension Service home economists help families learn new skills and obtain new knowledge for better living. They teach people about managing a household; providing nutritious, safe, and appetizing meals; managing available resources, including money and energy; planning and caring for clothing; improving personal and community relationships; and providing an attractive, safe, and healthy home environment.

This Extension education is available to people of all income levels—in rural, suburban, and urban communities. It is brought to them by Extension staffs, paid aides, and volunteers in 3,150 local offices in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and Micronesia. Nearly 30 million direct teaching contacts are made by Extension home economists each year. Millions more people benefit from Extension information provided through mass media.



History

Extension home economists have been reaching people with useful information since 1914, when passage of the Smith-Lever Act led to establishment of the Cooperative Extension system. The legislation provided for a unique partnership of federal (U.S. Department of Agriculture), state (land-grant universities), and local (county, parish, or city) governments in jointly funded programs. Even before 1914, many states across the Nation had Extension agents who taught people about canning, home sanitation, sewing, home beautification, building “fireless cookers,” and other activities.

Users

From early days and through the fifties, Extension home economists worked mainly with rural-based Extension homemakers. Today they bring information on a wide range of topics to a highly diversified clientele in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Extension’s current priority audiences include people with varying needs:

- People with similar special needs—working parents, low-income people, handicapped people, single-parent households, ethnic minorities, and others.
- People in specific stages of family life—youth, pregnant women, parents, young families and adults, senior citizens, and others.
- People who receive Extension education and then extend it to others—volunteer leaders, paraprofessional aides, professionals from other public or private agencies, and traditional Extension homemaker groups.



Process

Extension home economics education has followed the mandate of the Smith-Lever Act. . . "to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to. . .home economics, and to encourage the application of the same." The Cooperative Extension system forms a grassroots network that carries out the mandate by providing informal, out-of-school education. Specialists and researchers at state land-grant universities and federal Extension Service staff at USDA provide information and support for field staff.

Extension education is based on needs identified at local, state, and national levels. Extension staffs work closely with other government agencies and the private sector to better meet people's needs, make the most of available resources, and avoid duplicating efforts.

An important Extension tradition is the use of volunteer leaders. The thousands of volunteers trained by Extension home economists each year teach millions of adults and youth.

Staff

Staffs at all three levels—local, state, and federal—make up the Cooperative Extension home economics educational system.

- Extension's nearly 4,000 local home economists are all professionally trained and experienced educators.
- Nearly 5,000 paraprofessional aides are employed to teach low-income homemakers how to improve their families' diets in Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).
- About 900,000 Extension-trained volunteers, including 600,000 volunteer Extension homemakers who are members of the National Extension Homemakers Council (NEHC), make up the volunteer Extension team. NEHC has been closely associated with Extension since 1936. The volunteers extend Extension education to millions of people who would not otherwise be reached. Some 57,000

EFNEP volunteers help teach nutrition to low-income adults and young people. At least 150,000 volunteers trained by Extension home economists teach 4-H youth.

- More than 1,000 state Extension administrative staff and home economics specialists provide support to local staffs. Most specialists have master's or doctor's degrees in such fields as nutrition, food science, housing, family financial management, home furnishings, textiles and clothing, and human development.
- At the federal level, program leaders in home economics and human nutrition provide leadership and coordination to state home economics staffs.

Programs

In the eighties, Extension home economists' major initiatives are in these areas:

Food, Nutrition, and Health—helping people identify relationships between diet and health; teaching people how to select, prepare, preserve, and store food; informing people about the principles of food safety; determining attitudes and behavior that affect dietary patterns; and promoting fitness and health.

Family Economic Stability and Security—lifelong financial management, managing resources, increasing consumer competence in the marketplace, and understanding the economy.

Family Strengths and Social Environment—helping build strong, supportive family systems, and encouraging family and community leaders to work together to create an environment that supports the needs of all families.

Energy and Environment—limiting energy use, helping families achieve the best possible home environment through good housing decisions, and educating people about ways to control and conserve the quality of the soil, water, and air that make up their general environment.

Volunteer/Leadership Development—helping people develop community leadership skills; encouraging group involvement and participation in decisionmaking.

Delivery Methods

Extension home economics educators use a variety of methods to educate and inform consumers. The following are some examples:

- Mass media.
- Group meetings, seminars, and workshops.
- Personal contacts.
- Correspondence courses.
- Shopping mall programs and exhibits.
- Newsletters.
- Computer-assisted instruction.
- Taped telephone messages and consumer call-in services.
- Publications and fact sheets.
- Teleconferences.
- Cable television.

Results

Extension home economists all over the country are using a variety of methods in their educational outreach to improve the quality of people's lives. The following are some examples:

- A series of letters entitled "Blue Ribbon Babies Through Better Nutrition" has reached more than 5,000 pregnant women in *West Virginia*. More than 60 percent of the women who responded to a followup survey said they were drinking more milk, 36 percent were eating a dark green or deep yellow vegetable daily, 47 percent cut down on carbonated drinks, and 49 percent cut down on sweets.
- In *Washington*, Extension home economists in 14 counties have trained more than 200 "master food preservers." In return for their training, these volunteers have spent more than 12,000 hours teaching nearly 60,000 other people how to preserve food.
- In Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), 4,873 paraprofessional program aides trained and supervised by home economists are teaching nutrition and wise food buying and preparation to about 260,000 low-income homemakers and youth in 916 locations. As they graduate from the program, the homemakers

show significant changes in their dietary habits—they are eating a better variety of foods, eating more fruits and vegetables, and drinking more milk.

- *Michigan* Extension home economists reached more than 4,200 unemployed families with budgeting and food shopping information. About 85 percent reported improved nutrition for fewer dollars spent; 74 percent completed a spending plan.

Alabama's "Making It Through Hard Times" lesson series, newsletters, and media articles reached 35 percent of the unemployed families in that state.

- Extension home economists in *Arkansas* trained 2,459 volunteer leaders who taught more than 16,500 other people about clothing selection, remodeling old garments, and laundry and stain removal techniques. It is estimated that participants in this training extended their clothing dollars by more than \$4 million.

- More than 70,000 parents took part in a 1982 *Pennsylvania* home study program to help them be more effective parents. In Webb County, *Texas*, 6,853 families participated in parent education.

- In *Kansas*, 22,000 people received Extension training in stress management. An additional 126,000 people in 15 other states took part in Extension programs designed to help them cope with the stresses caused by economic uncertainty and social change.

- Nearly 2,500 *Arkansas* families reduced their annual energy costs by an average of \$269 each as a result of energy education carried out by Extension home economists in 41 counties in 1983. The savings resulted from such techniques as increasing insulation, adding storm windows and weather-stripping, and adjusting thermostats.



More Information

For information about other current state or local Extension home economics programs, contact the assistant director for home economics at your state land-grant university. Or call your local Cooperative Extension Service office (listed under county or city government in your telephone directory).

You can get more details about Extension home economics work throughout the United States from Home Economics and Human Nutrition, Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250.

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